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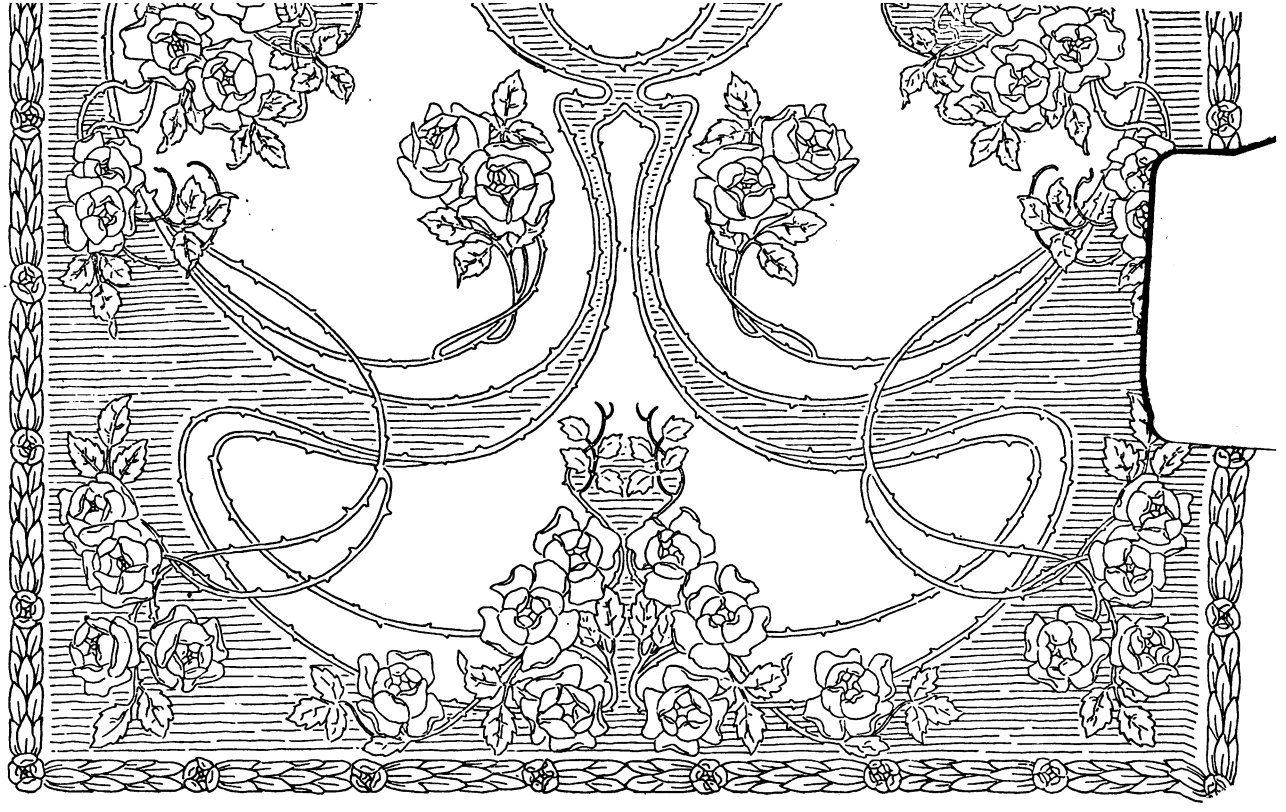

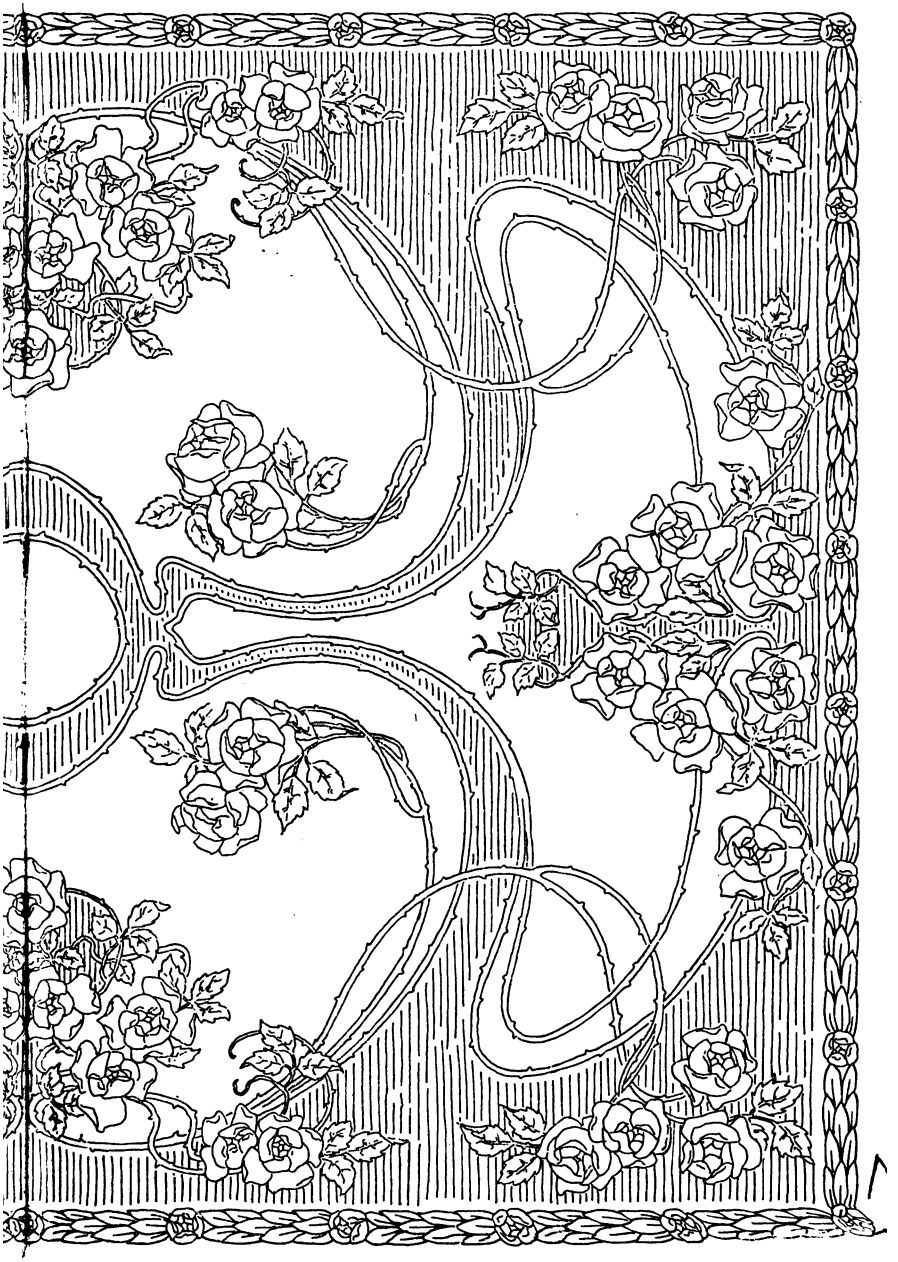

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"What does this my Lording mean?"

THE WATERMEAD AFFAIR

By ROBERT BARR

Author of "The Woman Intervenes"
"The Mutable Many," Etc.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY

CURTIS WAGER-SMITH

PHILADELPHIA

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"What does this my Lording mean?" . . . *Frontispiece*

The
Watermead
Affair

Chapter I

Chapter One

JOHN TRUMBLE, seventh Earl of Watermead, was notoriously the best driver of a motor in London. The police admitted that, even when giving testimony against him.

Watermead Manor is not much more than sixty miles from London, but when the young man did the

distance from his park gates to the Marble Arch in fifty-six minutes on his new Brusier-Grolier, a machine of the same make which, to the eternal glory of France, had won the Gordon-Bennett Cup that year, the bench of magistrates universally agreed that his lordship had not only gone too far, but too fast.

The excuse which he gave the bench on this occasion came near to augmenting his fine.

He said that he had been a week at Watermead, and suddenly there occurred to him the thought of the dreamy beauty of Marble Arch.

England, he said, was deficient in the artistic sense, and in order that the impression might not pass away

from him, and thus be lost forever, he leaped upon his motor, and came as quickly as he could to view the Marble Arch by moonlight; and his lordship assured the bench, almost with tears in his eyes, that the sight of the grimy marble had filled his mind with poetic thought, which should be encouraged in these days of commercialism.

The senior magistrate dryly remarked that his position compelled him to take the commercial, rather than the poetic, view of his lordship's action, whereupon he fined him a sum about as near to the maximum as he could get without actually reaching it.

Yet it was but two days later that

his lordship gave the Pullman express from Brighton three minute's start, overtook it, passed it, and would have beaten it into London had not the authorities, warned by telegraph, placed a barrier across the road south of Croydon, although they allowed the express to pass through, which Lord Watermead held was unfair treatment.

He accused the express of furious loitering, to the exasperation of all passengers, and held that he should be commended for consenting to teach that train its duty. Instead of approval he received censure, and was mulcted a fine as heavy as the law allowed.

He always referred to this race

with the Brighton express as a delightful leisurely episode in an otherwise fast life, and claimed with pride that there had then been applied to him, for the first time in England, the term "Road-hog."

Readers of newspapers will remember the parallels which were drawn by talented writers between Lord Watermead's life and his motoring career. Twice, because of his reckless driving, grave magistrates had expressed regret that the law did not allow them to send his lordship to prison.

The journal which had applied to him the designation of "Road-hog" consoled itself and the frightened public by the prediction that

some day his lordship's wrist would act less quickly and less timely than the occasion demanded, with the result that his lordship and his three-thousand-pound automobile would be involved in one conclusive smash.

On several occasions his own solicitors had warned him that he was going the pace that kills: not on the king's highway, but along the path of life he had chosen for himself.

To all these danger-signals his lordship paid not the slightest attention, and when his solicitors sent him a registered letter, urgently pointing out, as tersely as legal language would allow, that on a certain day he must appear in his Majesty's Court, the

Earl of Watermead did not even do the writers the honor of reading their communication, but had his valet carry out the rubbish, as he termed the heap delivered by the postman, which experience taught him consisted mainly of duns. The information which the solicitors sought to impart was therefore conveyed to him through another channel.

After a slight breakfast at two in the afternoon he strolled out into Piccadilly from his town house in the hope that a gentle walk would relieve the annoying headache which had made the day open gloomily for him, and when he had reached Piccadilly Circus he was startled, so far as such a self-contained man could be,

by seeing in huge black letters on the contents-bills of the evening papers the words:

BANKRUPTCY OF THE EARL OF WATERMEAD

And on another sheet, in equally striking type, he read the phrase:

A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

The End of Lord Watermead's Extravagance

He bought a paper, thrust it into his pocket, and turned slowly homeward again, his headache no better for the stroll.

"I suppose I'll have to go see those bally solicitors," muttered his lordship to himself. "I wonder why

they allowed things to get into this cursed mess. They are paid to keep me out of that sort of thing. A fool and his money, eh?"

Six years before, at the age of twenty-one, John Trumble had come into the estate of Watermead, the town house, the Scotch shooting, and an income of thirty thousand pounds a year. Surely, if the solicitors were the business men they pretended to be, they could have got along with so much as that to work upon, especially as he never made any objection to signing whatever was presented to him!

Letting himself in with his latch-key, he was confronted by a burly, deferential person, so evidently be-

longing to the lower classes that his lordship wondered why he had been admitted. A slight uplifting of his lordship's eyebrows indicated the question which the lips did not utter, and the stranger hastened to reply, hat in hand, punctuating his remarks with frequent uplifting of the forefinger to the brow.

"My name is Bloggs, m'lord. I'm one of the men in possession, m'lord."

"Ah, really," replied his lordship courteously.

"All the servants have gone, m'lord. Your valet was the last to go, and he asked me to keep out of sight until he got your lordship's breakfast."

"That was very thoughtful," said John Trumble.

"And so, m'lord," we keeps out of your lordship's sight until your lordship goes out half an hour since."

"That was very kind of you," acknowledged Trumble. He thrust a hand into one pocket and found it empty. In the other, however, he came in contact with a solitary half-crown, which he produced and presented to the bowing Bloggs.

"Do you happen to know if my chauffeur has gone as well? If not, would you mind asking him to bring round No. 16 to the door?"

The day before the Earl of Watermead had owned sixteen automobiles, and the one he indicated by the num-

ber mentioned was the celebrated Brusier-Grolier. The modest Bloggs coughed slightly behind his hand.

"I'm afraid, m'lord, he's gone, but even if he was here he wouldn't be allowed to take away anything from the premises, m'lord. You see, they're taking an inventory, and our man with a man from your solicitors are a-doing of it at this moment, and nothing must leave the 'ouse without permission of the Court, m'lord."

"How interesting! Why should they be afraid of any one taking things away?"

"Well, m'lord, it's frequently done, or frequently attempted, in cases like this. You see, m'lord,

everything must be produced at the sale, and we that are here are responsible for the safe-keeping of all the valuables."

"The sale?" echoed his lordship, and for the first time a slight frown ruffled his brow. "The sale? Ah, there's going to be a sale, is there? Quite so, quite so!"

He turned and went out, leaving the deferential Bloggs standing there. Once in Piccadilly again Trumble was about to call a cab, when he remembered that the extraction of the half-crown had left his pockets empty. Recollecting a spot where his signature on a check was good for ten pounds, his lordship turned down St. James Street and

made for his club. Here he wrote out a check for that amount, handed it to a servant, who returned shortly afterward with the document still in his hand, and said in a hushed whisper:

"I am very sorry, my lord, but the secretary is not in."

"Very well," remarked Trumble shortly, thrusting the crumpled slip of paper into his empty pocket. He knew that the absence or presence of the secretary had nothing to do with the cashing of a check, and the thought crossed his mind—it had not occurred to him before—that, if there was a man in possession of his house, there was doubtless another in charge of his bank-account.

After all, it didn't much matter. He would merely need to borrow from one of his friends until the solicitors straightened out the tangle. He strolled into the smoking-room, which he found empty except for the presence of Sir William Dillow, who was standing by a table, languidly turning over the pages of some of the weeklies.

"Billy," said Trumble, "lend me fifty pounds till to-morrow."

"Hello, Johnny; that you?" cried Sir William cheerfully, looking up. "I've been waiting for you. Wanted to borrow a fiver. You don't mean to tell me you're stony broke, old man? Nothing serious in this rot the papers are printing, is there?"

"Can't say until I've seen my solicitors," replied Johnny rather disconsolately, thrusting his hands into his empty pockets.

"Oh, I suppose it just means the Continent for a bit, and there's some jolly places over in France when a man's down on his luck," rejoined Sir William encouragingly; then he suddenly pulled out his watch and ejaculated, "By Jove!" in a tone almost of terror.

"I came near to forgetting an important appointment," he explained hurriedly as he left the room.

Johnny followed more leisurely, and when he paused irresolute at the top of the steps Sir William had disappeared.

"Hansom, m'lord?" inquired a cabby, dashing up to the curb and raising the handle of the whip to his cap.

"No, thanks," said Johnny almost gruffly. He saw that the cabby had just tucked under the strap that evening paper which had alluded to the case of a fool and his money. As he walked up the street the cabby slowly kept pace with him.

"Anywhere you like, m'lord," said the insistent man, bending from his perch.

"If you *must* know it," protested Johnny, "I haven't a bally penny in my pocket. Now make off with you."

"Right you are, m'lord. Step

inside, m'lord. Where to m'lord?"

The sporting proclivities of the Earl of Watermead had made him a great favorite with the cabmen of London. Johnny recognized the friendliness of the invitation, and after a moment's pause stepped inside, saying briefly, "The Temple."

"I'll wait for you, m'lord," said the cabby, as he drew up opposite the court which contained the offices of Watermead's solicitors. Johnny did not answer: an unaccustomed contraction of the throat made him reluctant to trust his voice. Things had come to a fine pass if quondam friends refused him accommodation, and he had to depend on the charity of a cabby.

Despondently, therefore, the fool mounted the stairs which led to the chambers of the grim men who had often warned him of the consequences of his folly. Even here he was kept waiting in the anteroom for a few minutes, and then the clerk conducted him into the presence of Mr. Rolls himself.

"Well, Rolls, we seem to have got into a bally mess," began his lordship with a jauntiness he was far from feeling.

Mr. Rolls gravely inclined his head.

"I bought a paper this morning, but I haven't had time to read it. What is it all about, Rolls?"

The solicitor explained the situa-

tion in cold, legal terms which left nothing missing in the way of definiteness.

"Do you mean to say everything will be sold—jewels and all?" asked Johnny.

"Everything, my lord, except the heirlooms."

"Ain't I allowed to keep something, one automobile, for instance?"

The lawyer slowly shook his head.

"My lord," he said, you have no legal right to the rings on your fingers, or the watch in your waistcoat pocket."

Johnny looked for a moment at the back of his outstretched hand, then he pulled off the rings and laid those ornaments on the table before

the gentleman of law. Next he placed the watch and chain beside them. Old Mr. Rolls seemed taken aback by this action. He explained with some care, speaking as one fearing to commit himself to any illegal action:

"I am not the official custodian of such treasures, my lord. Perhaps it may be well to retain them until the Receiver makes formal application."

"Oh, very well, I'll keep the watch till it's asked for. The rings may go in with the rest of the plunder. Come to think of it, I never cared much about them, but Dolly presented them to me, and so I wore them."

The old man's brow lowered, and he commented severely:

"And I've no doubt she allowed the bill to be sent to you as well as the jewelry."

The young man laughed.

"Perhaps the did," he replied, nevertheless brightening at the thought of sweet, pretty, artless, little Dolly Carmichael, whose presence in the cast of that delightful musical comedy, The Spider and the Fly, was filling one of the largest theatres in London, where her beauty was so superior to either her singing or her acting that she was undoubtedly one of the greatest dramatic successes of the year.

But the thought which bright-

ened the countenance of the young man cast a gloom over that of his elder, who said coldly:

"There is only one folly left for you to commit, my lord, and that is a penniless marriage," for old Mr. Rolls remembered the items which of late had been floating about in the society papers, hinting at the prospects of the fascinating Dolly's joining the aristocracy.

The young man was thinking what an ass he had been to apply to that beast Dillow for fifty pounds when Dolly would have been overjoyed to lend him the money for a day or two. A man, of course, could not take money from a woman except as a loan, and that to be as

promptly repaid as if it were a gambling debt.

"The court allows you," continued Mr. Rolls, "one hundred pounds a month until such time as your creditors are satisfied."

"A hundred pounds a month!" echoed the young man in dismay. "What can a fellow do on such a sum as that?"

"There are many living in London at the present moment on less," responded the old gentleman with the air of finality which one uses when making a statement that cannot be questioned.

"How long will it be before everything is straightened out!" inquired Trumble.

"That will depend entirely on the product of the sale. If the articles you have bought fetch anything like what you paid for them, the law will soon have little claim upon you."

"Ah, some of the things are at a premium. Three at least of the automobiles are." Then he laughed quietly to himself. "But a good deal of the jewelry is where the courts won't get their hands on it, I think. Still, there's no good crying over spilt milk. Let me have the twelve hundred for the first year, and I won't trouble you any longer."

"I didn't say twelve hundred a year," replied the lawyer. "I said one hundred pounds a month."

"Same thing, isn't it?" asked the Earl.

"No, my lord, it is not. There is now due you one hundred pounds. Another hundred pounds will be paid on the first of next month."

His lordship whistled.

"Very well. Hand over the hundred. I'm stony broke."

The money was counted out to him and his receipt taken, whereupon his lordship went downstairs and handed the waiting cabman a golden soverign.

"Thank you, m'lord. Where to, m'lord?"

"Half Moon Street," said the Earl, stepping into the cab.

The cabby smiled. He did not

need to be told the number. He knew well the residence of the charming Miss Dolly Carmichael.

Chapter II

Chapter Two

THE CAB was compelled to draw up at a little distance from the door, because Sir William Dillow's thirty-horse-power Hardpan was opposite the front. The Earl recognized the machine. He dismissed the cabman with a word of thanks, and rang the bell.

"Not at home, my lord," said the powdered footman.

"I think," protested the Earl mildly, "that, if you take my name, you will find that the lady is in."

"Not at home, my lord," repeated the footman, which left no doubt in the hearer's mind that the instructions had been definite.

Before the door could be closed he heard the sweet, silvery, rippling laughter of Dolly in the hallway, a tribute to some remark made in the deep bass voice of Sir William Dillow. A moment later the pair appeared upon the threshold, Dolly as becomingly costumed as an automobile outfit would permit. She gave utterance to a little half-hysterical shriek on

seeing Trumble standing there, but the young man's face was wreathed in smiles.

"How do you do, Dolly?" he said genially. "You look positively charming this afternoon, and a lovely day it is for a spin, too."

"I am so sorry," gasped Dolly, rapidly turning in her mind the first falsehood that came to hand; "but you see I was going out driving, so I said I was at home to nobody."

"Oh, of course!" said Johnny. "That's all right. I quite understand, but you see I recognized Billy's Hardpan here, and I remember the fiver he wanted at the club an hour ago, when I hadn't a penny in my

pocket. Glad to accommodate you, Billy."

And with this he airily tendered to Dillow a five-pound note between his first and second fingers, which the other had not the presence of mind to refuse, being a bulky, unready man; so Johnny, lifting his hat to the lady, and waving a genial farewell to the pair, descended the steps with the easy nonchalance of a nobleman sure of his position.

A little later the automobile whizzed past. Sir William had his eyes fixed steadily ahead, and Dolly was gazing at the houses on the opposite side of the street.

The Earl of Watermead smiled grimly, and walked on and on. He

crossed the river by some unnoted bridge, wandered through hideous streets, came out into a wider, tram-crowded thoroughfare, passed great emporiums the names of which were unfamiliar to him, and where the chief attraction to buyers was the prices displayed on big cards where the penny was split into farthings. He arrived at a park or common, and through that into the suburbs of a city to him unknown.

Lower and lower descended the sun, and on and on he walked. His headache was gone and forgotten, and a healthy hunger reminded him of the scanty breakfast taken at two o'clock. He began to feel physically tired, and rested with his arms

young man of about his own age, quite evidently an extremely respectable clerk, and not a disreputable nobleman. There was a trace of anxiety in the voice that had accosted him, and a trace of eagerness in the inquirer's face.

The Earl at once set him down as an assistant in a land-agent's office, who hoped to make a commission by letting the villa, and his naturally kind disposition made him hesitate about dampening the other's hopes by an abrupt "No."

"Well," said his lordship frankly, "it seems, as the card says, a desirable residence, and then it's so nice and new."

"It's all that," replied the other

with an air of despondency, "and it's bound to be snapped up before long, although it's rather dear. They want thirty pounds a year for it," he added in a note of warning.

"Bless my soul," exclaimed the Earl, "you don't mean to tell me so! Are you interested in the letting of it?"

"In a way I am. That is to say, I hope it won't be let for a while yet, because I should like to take it myself."

"Then why the deuce don't you?"

"I'd do it quick enough if I had another twenty-five pounds to my name."

"Ah, that's the trouble, is it? Well,

money is not so easily picked up as some people seem to think."

"It is not," replied the young man emphatically. "You see, I get a hundred and fifty a year, and we could pay the rent and live very well on that, but then there's the furniture, and though I've got a bit saved, yet it's not enough to do justice to so fine a house."

"It *is* rather gorgeous," admitted the Earl, gazing again at the little villa. "But can't you get furniture on the what-you-call-it system, paying a bit at a time? Seems to me I've seen advertisements to that effect."

"Oh yes," replied the stranger, "and that's what I'd like to do, but

my sister-in-law thinks we shouldn't start by getting into debt."

"Ah, you're a married man then?" suggested his lordship, interest awakening in spite of himself.

"No, not yet, but by the greatest piece of luck in the world I have become engaged to a girl who is far too good for me. She is a lady, and the daughter of our clergyman."

"I see, and the clergyman objected, or I venture to say his wife did."

"No, but the elder daughter did. The mother has been dead for some years, and the clergyman is a man absorbed in his books. He doesn't seem to take interest in anything else, but Kate—that's the eldest daughter

—is very proud, and thinks gentlefolks ought to marry in their own class."

"Really! Well, gentlemen are not so bally particular, are they?" said the Earl, flinging back a lingering thought to Dolly, seated beside Sir William in the automobile, with her face turned away.

"Kate gave her consent at last, because Mary—that's my girl—just seemed to droop away when Kate refused to hear of our engagement. Of course, the father didn't count."

"And the drooping business did it?" remarked the Earl flippantly. "It's a powerful weapon that, with the women who know how to handle it."

The stranger seemed offended at this light way of talking about so serious a subject. He remained silent, and the Earl, quickly regretting his cynicism, said cordially:

"Do you mean to tell me that twenty-five pounds stands between two young people and happiness? That's absurd. I never knew happiness could be bought so cheaply. Take the villa, marry the girl in spite of the elder sister, and here's the twenty-five pounds."

Chapter III

Chapter THREE

THE clerk's mild blue eyes opened wide, with first a glimmer of alarm in them, which presently kindled to a spark of resentment as the suspicion awakened that he was being played with—his sacred confidence made the subject of an ill-timed joke. He shrank back a

step, and placed his right hand on the fence-rail to steady himself.

A very winning smile hovered round his lordship's lips as he noticed the speechless confusion of the young fellow confronting him.

"There are various perplexities floating through your mind at the present moment, none of which matters in the least. Let me assure you that there is but one problem in this transaction which merits your attention."

"What is that?" asked the clerk huskily.

"Whether these notes are genuine or not. Take them round to the nearest tradesman, and he will solve the question for you."

"I don't need to do that," murmured the clerk. "I finger many a note, although I own so few of them."

"Then finger these," said the Earl.

The clerk took them like a man in a dream, and very expertly ran each of the five crisp, crackling bits of white paper between finger and thumb.

"Yes, they're good enough," he muttered.

He gazed at the villa, feeling the need of mental support, as the moment before he had felt the need of physical support against the fence. The villa stood there in its red-brick commonplaceness. It required all its smug conventionality to give even

a semblance of saneness to the situation.

"My name's Richard Maitland. I'm an accountant in the city on three pounds a week. May I ask who you are?" The thought of the city, the influence of the villa, were having their effect. The young man had pulled himself together.

The Earl laughed at the recovery.

"My name is John Trumble," he replied.

"What's your line?

"My line? My occupation, you mean?" His eyes scrutinized the gravel at his feet for a moment, then he looked up frankly. "I am by way of being a chauffeur."

"A chauffeur? Ah, there's good

money in that, I'm told. Are you out of a job?"

"Yes."

"Why did you leave your last place?"

"I didn't. It left me."

"For whom were you working?"

"The Earl of Watermead."

"What, the chap who went smash?"

"Exactly. The chap who went smash."

"Then this is some of his money?" said Maitland, with a tone of relief he took no pains to conceal.

The Earl laughed with more heartiness than had hitherto been the case.

"You have tracked the notes to

their origin with the infallibility of a detective. Great Heavens, how suspicious you are! What did you take me for? A burglar?"

"No, no," protested Maitland hurriedly. "Anyone can see at a glance you are an honest man. No, what I was thinking about was another job. I know a man who wants a chauffeur: Doctor Mead, who lives next door to the Reverend Mr. Erroll. I don't think he'd like to give more than thirty shillings a week, though.

You see, it's rather a small car: a doctor's car, they call it, but he doesn't seem able to manage it himself. He's getting on in years, is Mr. Mead, and he's afraid of it, but

his practice is growing, and he wants to keep up with the times. You would have your board and lodging, of course."

"Why, that's splendid," said the Earl, without as much enthusiasm in his voice as his statement might have inferred. "You're a fine chap, Maitland, thinking more of another man's welfare than your own. Let's get back to your affairs. May I take it that the villa is secured, and the wedding bells will ring presently?"

A shade of doubt crossed Maitland's face.

"I don't quite know what to say to Kate."

"That's the sister, is it?'

"Yes."

"The terror of the household, eh?"

"Oh, no, no! But Kate's a girl you can't lie to. Mary would believe anything I told her, but you must have a very straight story if you are to meet those steady, honest eyes of Kate."

"How inconvenient," commented the Earl. "Then why not tell her the truth—as a last resort?"

Maitland glanced at the five-pound notes in his hand, then turned his gaze resolutely on the villa once more. He sighed deeply.

"If you think I can tell Kate Erroll that I met a complete stranger in the street who handed over twenty-five pounds to me without security

and without my asking for the money, well——" Here speech failed him. Then, with a sudden burst of resolution he cried: "Here, I can't take your money! You're out of a job, and I'm not."

"Don't worry about me," said the Earl, pulling from his trousers' pocket nearly seventy pounds in notes and gold.

"I cannot accept the money," replied Maitland with decision.

Trumble received it back, and thrust it into his pocket, then, placing his hand on the other's shoulder, he said:

"You arouse a certain amount of opposition. I am accustomed to having my own way, but this seems

an exceptional day, and I have been checkmated several times already. I see, however, what's the trouble with you. You are afraid of Kate."

"Yes, I am," admitted Maitland.

"Kate is the old-maid sister?"

"Oh, no, she isn't! She's not twenty-two yet."

"Not pretty, then, and perhaps a little jealous of her sister's good fortune?"

Maitland made a gesture of impatience.

"She's the handsomest girl in the neighborhood, but holds herself aloof."

"Distant, and a little proud, perhaps. I see. Nevertheless, you're afraid of her. I'm not. How far from here

is the rectory, or the vicarage, or whatever it is?"

"About a quarter of a mile."

"Good. We can't get a cab in this forlorn spot, but the walk won't hurt us. Lead me to Kate, and introduce me."

"Will you come?" asked Maitland eagerly, the light in his eyes vacillating between hope and fear.

"Come? Am I not imploring you to take me? I am beginning to suspect you of selfishness, trying to get out of your promise regarding that medical situation at thirty bob a week, with board and lodging."

"No, I hadn't forgotten that. Come along."

They left this newer section of

the district, and penetrated into wide and shaded streets, with a look of homely comfort about them. Each house stood in its own plot, and some of the older-fashioned residences were surrounded by grounds unexpectedly ample, with broad green lawns, large trees and thick shrubberies.

The rectory proved to be one of these secluded spots, the walls of thick green allowing no portion of the grounds to be seen from the road, except at the gate. The house was a low and long two-storied building, the ground-floor windows reaching down to the green lawn. Maitland paused almost in awe with his hand on the gate.

"You understand now," he said

in a low voice, "what it means to a man in my position to be received in a home like this."

"I see," replied the Earl with that frank smile of his. "You are marrying above you, as the penny novelettes have it, and you'd like to caution me for your sake to try and make a good impression upon the inmates. All right, I'll do my best; but remember, it's the man without fear who conquers. I fancy you are holding yourself too humbly."

"No, I wasn't going to say that, but I should have told you that Miss Erroll is a most accomplished, well-read young lady, who—"

"Yes, I know, I know. Will you open the gate, or shall I?"

Maitland opened the gate. In the most secluded part of the grounds, under the branches of an ancient gigantic beech, a tea-table was spread. Beside it, in a deep arm-chair of cane, sat a venerable gentleman with a huge book open upon his knee. A very trim, prim maid, in white and black, was bringing a plate of cake across the level lawn.

A fluffy girl, with fluffy auburn hair, in a fluffy white dress was seated on a little camp stool, and when she heard the gate click, and saw who had come in, she sprang to her feet with a delicious little child-like cry of joy, and raced across the lawn to meet them. A taller, darker girl stood by the tea-table, her serious,

beautiful face turned toward the newcomers.

"Ah," said the Earl softly, "that's Kate, is it?" as he met the unwavering regard of those fine eyes.

"No, this is Mary," said Maitland innocently, and when she had come up to them: "My friend, Mr. Trumble—Miss Mary Erroll."

Mary shook hands very cordially with the stranger, then she whisked round, linked arms with her lover, and thus the trio approached the standing Diana of the tea-table, whose air of quiet dignity lacked the exuberant welcome which the other had impetuously extended.

"Miss Erroll," said Maitland, a little waveringly, deference and gentle

beseechment in his voice, "my friend, Mr. Trumble."

The young lady inclined her head. "Mr. Erroll—Mr. Trumble."

The old man paid no attention. His elder daughter put her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Father!" she said.

He looked up at her, saw the stranger and nodded.

"You are very welcome, sir." Then, including Richard in his smile, sank once more into his book, and it was quite evident a moment later that the company and his daughters had vanished from the face of the earth so far as he was concerned.

"We've been expecting you,

Richard, for nearly half an hour," said Kate reproachfully.

"Yes, I was—I was—er—unexpectedly detained—er—I met—I went round to the villa, you see, and —er——"

"It is all my fault, Miss Erroll," interrupted the Earl calmly. "I held him, as the wedding guest was held on a former occasion."

The girl looked intently at him. She had seen well-dressed young men before, but there was something in the cut and fit of Trumble's clothes that was different; something in his air of nonchalance that was different; something in the almost insolent ease with which he seated himself in the wicker chair which the maid had brought,

that Miss Erroll had never met with before. However, he did not seat himself until she had done so; then he went on indolently:

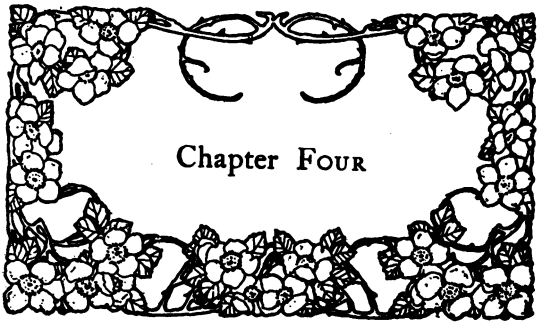
"Not only did I detain him, but in the most unblushing way I begged an invitation to accompany him."

"I am very glad he brought you," said the young woman coldly. "And now may I give you some tea?"

"You may give *me* some tea," said John Trumble smiling, "but my friend Maitland must wait. You see, Miss Erroll, I am by way of being a chauffeur out of employment, and Maitland was good enough to say he thought the doctor next door might employ me. Maitland, you must know how often these affairs

are jeopardized by even a moment's delay. I implore you to see Doctor Mead at once, and I suggest that Miss Mary here go with you, to use her influence in my favor."

Chapter IV



KATE ERROLL leaned back in her chair in dumb amazement at this impudent disposal of her guests by the debonair young stranger who sat smiling before her. Blank dismay sat on the countenance of Richard Maitland at this inauspicious display of his new friend's diplo-

macy, but the tension of the situation was relieved by the volatile Mary, who sprang laughing to her feet.

"What a good idea!" she exclaimed. "Come along, Dick, and we'll have tea with Mr. and Mrs. Mead." With this she whirled her amazed lover to the right-about, and sped before him across the lawn toward a little gate in the boundary hedge, which indicated a certain friendly familiarity between the two households.

Maitland followed doubtfully. Miss Erroll leaned back very still and severe in the seat of judgment, and the young man saw that the verdict was against him by the deep resentment visible on her brow.

"There," he cried airily, "we're quit of them! A pair of self-absorbed lovers are always in the way of sensible people like you and me, Miss Erroll, and, in spite of all that has happened, you *did* promise me a cup of tea, you know.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried Kate, brought to a sudden realization of her own failure as a hostess. "Cream and sugar?" she asked.

"Both, if I may be so greedy."

She passed the cup across the table to him, and as he took it he said with a quiet, almost caressing inflection:

"I understand it all now: it seemed incomprehensible when I first saw you."

"You understand what?" asked the girl shortly.

"Why Richard is afraid of you."

"Afraid of me?" she questioned, startled out of the impassiveness she had imposed upon herself. "Richard is not in the least afraid of me!"

"Oh, he lives in a state of abject terror, which seemed to me unmanly when I learned of it! But now that I have seen those eyes of yours darken, and watched the gathering lightning in their depths, comprehension has come to me. Half an hour ago I said rashly to my friend Maitland: 'Take me to her; I'm not afraid of her.' I don't think I should make such a rash statement now."

There was interest mixed with displeasure with which she steadfastly regarded him.

"You are the most amazing man I ever met, Mr. Trumble."

"I am glad to hear you say so. There are not many amazing men in the world; most of us seem to be cast in the same mould. I think I must be improving. I was one of the conventional lot myself until this morning."

"And what happened this morning?" asked Kate, before she could stop herself.

"Oh, I was startled out of my complacency! I lost my situation as chauffeur."

"You are no chauffeur," she said impulsively.

"Ah, you do me an injustice! If ever you saw me drive an automobile in a difficult place you wouldn't say that."

"If you ever drove an automobile it was your own."

Trumble shook his head, smiling.

"I wish I possessed one," he replied. "But, that I may not thus enter the Garden of Eden under false pretenses, I must tell you that everything I own is on my back and in my pocket."

"I do not believe you," she rejoined, the brow still clouded.

"Then my friend Maitland flattered you. He said no one could

tell a lie in your presence, and the natural inference was that you would recognize truth when you heard it. I regret to find that such is not the case. I have done many reprehensible things in my life, but no one ever called me a liar before."

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I have not called you that!"

"People in our circle do not say it crudely, as they do, perhaps, in Whitechapel, but the intimation was there, nevertheless."

"Then I apologize," said Miss Erroll primly.

"I accept your apology unreservedly. And now may I hope that we are back within the lines of friendship again?"

"What do you mean by friendship, and our circle?" she asked, to set him back into his place, her eloquent eyes again giving hint of his encroachment.

"Well, Maitland is my oldest and most treasured friend. He is to marry your sister. Therefore I had the temerity to include myself in the circle, and hoped to find friendship within it."

"It is strange I never heard him speak of you before."

"Not strange at all, Miss Erroll, when you consider that an hour ago I did not know he existed, nor was he aware that John Trumble cumbered the earth."

"Then what do you mean," she

asked with indignation, "by referring to him as your oldest——" she stopped abruptly, made a gesture of impatience with her two hands and continued:

"I suppose, like most women, I am deficient in a sense of humor, but I may say at once I do not like your style of it."

"Humor, dear lady!" he protested earnestly, leaning toward her, the empty cup in his hand. "Humor! You call what I have said humor, and entirely fail to see that it is the most pathetic thing you have ever heard!

"Here am I, a young man of twenty-seven, and I tell you, on my honor, that a stranger I met casually

an hour ago is the only friend I have in the world. In God's name, where do you find humor in that statement?"

The girl half rose in her chair, gazing across at him with an expression almost of affright. The ring of sincerity was in his voice, and its tone disturbed even the placid old clergyman, who looked up for a moment from his book, smiled placidly upon them, and returned to his pages once more.

John Trumble, with a shrug of the shoulders and a shake of the head, cast off the mood.

"Let us get back to practical things!" he cried. "This morning I had the slightest of breakfasts: to-

day no lunch: and this afternoon I have tramped miles."

"Looking for work?" she asked with sympathy.

"I don't know what I was looking for: perhaps for this Garden of Eden which I seem to have stumbled into, manifestly to the discomposure of its guardian angel. But let the beggar at your gate implore another cup of tea, and a free hand with this ample plate of bread and butter. No; no cake, thanks. I confess to be exceedingly hungry."

"Oh dear, oh dear! here have I been acting critic, and utterly failing in my duties as hostess!"

She struck the hand-bell on the table with such passionate vehemence

that her father nearly jumped out of his chair, then smiled on them and resumed his reading.

"Not hostess, Miss Erroll—patroness. You have already cast me out of the circle, and I am but the beggar at the gate."

The maid responded to the appeal, and was told to bring a fresh pot of tea and a plate of chicken and ham. Then Kate turned to her guest with a smile on her lips.

"I am afraid you are rather ruthless, Mr. Trumble. I have already offered you one apology, and now I appear to owe you another, but it seems to me you are rather emphasizing my deficiencies."

"With a purpose, Miss Erroll,

and I bid you beware, or I'll pile more on your shoulders, unless you now transfer the whole burden to mine."

"I do not understand you."

"I learned this afternoon that a beggarly twenty-five pounds stood in the way of the happiness of two worthy young people. I offered the man the money, and he took it in dazed fashion, thinking there was some trick, some catch, some joke; but when he found the notes were real and actually at his disposal, there rose before him the menacing figure of his future sister, Kate.

"She, whom he could not lie to, would never believe the truth. He

forced the money back into my possession again.

"I ask you to admire that young man. Is there another in all London who, being tendered twenty-five pounds by a complete stranger, would not grasp the notes and run?

"You could not have persuaded me yesterday that such a man existed. Yet, having found him, I was amazed that he should be terrorized by a woman. There grew up in my mind the picture of Kate: tall, I admit, but thin and vinegary; sharp features, compressed mouth, frowning brow; bitter with the world, or over-righteous, which is the same thing. 'Take me to Kate,' said I, 'and I'll force her to accept the money.'"

The girl watched him breathless, like one fascinated. When he paused she murmured:

"And you found the task infinitely harder than you had expected?"

"No, infinitely easier. Instead of harshness, I find sympathy; instead of old-maidish jealousy, I detect a sisterly affection too deep for mere words. Your attitude, as I came in at the gate, was typical of your position these months past.

"You have been standing alone: you have had to decide alone: this match did not please you; you thought your sister was stepping outside her circle, but her manifest love for her lover has caused you to push aside

your pride and give your consent with a sigh."

As he spoke the girl's fine eyes wavered and fell, her slightly trembling right hand unconsciously sought her father's shoulder, and at its light touch the old man looked up, smiled and resumed his reading again.

"Now, I have come to reassure you. I have come to prove to you that this young man is pure gold—the worthy mate of any girl. He is honest, steadfast, true-hearted and good-natured. I wish I could add that he is courageous—but how can I, when his admiration for his sister Kate is only equaled by his fear of her? I share the one feeling, but

not the other, and, to prove it, here are the twenty-five pounds."

He placed the white notes on the white tablecloth before her, his eyes challenging a refusal. She sat there motionless and silent.

"I hear them making a move in the next garden," he cried, "and they will be with us in a moment! Conceal those notes quickly!"

Awakened to life, the girl reached for the money, and thrust it out of sight among the folds of her white gown, a rush of color obliterating the paleness which for some minutes had blanched her face. Without giving her time to rally he added cheerily:

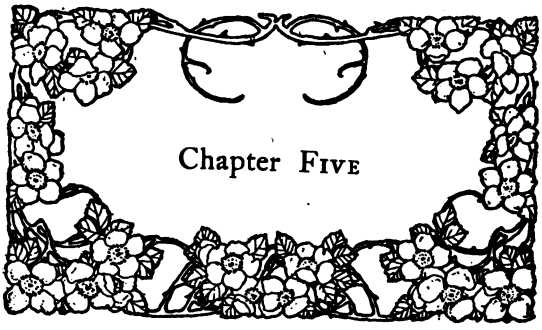
"And please touch the bell again

so that these evidences of my disgraceful hunger may be seen by no one but yourself."

Before the maid had quite finished clearing away the tea things, the boundary-gate opened, and the two young people brought in Doctor Mead with them.

An arrangement was quickly arrived at, and so John Trumble became chauffeur to Doctor Mead, driving a measly little single-cylinder motor-car which he despised, but which his mechanical ingenuity soon tinkered into a speedy machine that began to attract the attention of the police.

Chapter V



TRUMBLE proved a very efficient chauffeur, and gave Doctor Mead the greatest possible satisfaction. The doctor was a quiet, grave, elderly man with a very extensive practice—a large part of it, alas, in slums, from which no revenue was derived, yet which was not neglected on that

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account by the conscientious physician.

More and more he came to like the young man who sat by his side on the motor-car, and strangely enough one of the qualities he most admired in him was his extreme caution, little dreaming that this careful mechanician was the person who had taken such risks to beat the Brighton express.

Often, during their visits to the slums, Trumble was called in to assist the doctor in some surgical case, and these visits to hopeless squalor turned his lordship toward a line of thought which had never occupied his mind before.

He found some difficulty in main-

taining social relations with the Rectory, endeavoring, without success, to return to that state of confidential relationship with Miss Erroll which he had achieved on his first interview. When he ventured across the boundary line his reception was more apt to be frosty than cordial, but the icy demeanor wore thin, and once or twice broke away altogether.

Her general attitude toward him was one of reserve, not unmixed with vague fear, as was shown now and then by troubled glances which she bestowed on him.

His own demeanor was that of an easy-going man of the world, completely immune from any dislike of him she cared to show, and evidently

without the slightest notion that a chauffeur at thirty shillings a week occupied about the lowest round of the social ladder.

All the doctor's praises of the young man merely emphasized his humble position, and she wondered at herself for permitting even an approach to friendliness, yet somehow it seemed quite natural when he was present.

Sometimes, when they were alone, he dared to make an audacious remark such as should only be permitted to persons on the footing of the greatest intimacy, and she always remembered afterward, with burning cheeks, that she should have resented it at the time—which she had not done.

One afternoon he was rather astonished to find a note from her, asking him to call that evening at six. He found her alone, seated by the table in a secluded corner of the lawn. She seemed very radiant, as if something toward had happened.

She invited him almost joyfully to sit down, and when he had done so, raised her hand from the table and disclosed five golden sovereigns lying there. He had never seen her so animated before, and her smile, he admitted to himself, was intoxicating.

"The first of five payments, Mr. Trumble," she said.

"I hope you have not been goading those two happy young people about this little debt, or do you intend

to inaugurate a new order of things altogether?"

"What new order of things?"

"The repayment of a loan. I never knew of borrowed money being repaid before."

"Why do you say a cynical thing like that? Don't you repay money loaned to you?"

"I have never been able to borrow any," replied Trumble with a laugh.

"I suppose," she said, frowning a little, "that it was your acquaintance with the Earl of Watermead which taught you to scoff at obligation."

"I admit I have thought of late that my association with his lordship

has done me little good. Still, after all, even he is paying for his fun."

"Yes under compulsion of the court."

"Well, Miss Erroll, he has always been rather generous to me, so I shall say nothing against him, except to wish him more sense in future. But as to this loan of mine, I don't at all need the money. I'm actually saving money at the present moment."

"What, on thirty shillings a week?"

"Oh, it's thirty-five. Didn't you know the doctor had raised me five shillings?"

"Please take the five pounds," she insisted. But he made no motion toward it.

"I don't like the method of payment."

"Do you wish it all at once?"

"No, I want it in daily installments, and I ask permission to call and dun you each evening."

"Mr. Trumble," said Kate, "once or twice already you have ventured to make a remark of that nature. If you knew the displeasure with which I listen to such an observation, I am sure you are kind-hearted enough, and"—she paused, then took the plunge—"gentlemanly enough not to repeat the cause of offence."

"The offence, Miss Erroll, lies not in the words themselves, but in the person who spoke them. If a friend whom you liked, and whom

you considered a social equal, told you it would give him pleasure to see you every day, you would not be offended, but pleased.

"When I gave you the money, of which the gold on the table is part repayment, I told you that your mind had been perturbed because of your sister's impending marriage, and you did not contradict me. I now tell you that your mind is perturbed because of your own."

"Of my own what?" cried the girl.

"Of your own impending marriage."

"Sir, you are talking nonsense!"

"No, I am not. You are saying to yourself, 'This man is impossible

—impossible—impossible.' You are perhaps quite right, having regard to his present position. That position deters me from making a formal proposal; nevertheless, six months hence things will have changed, and I warn you, Kate, that I am going to marry you."

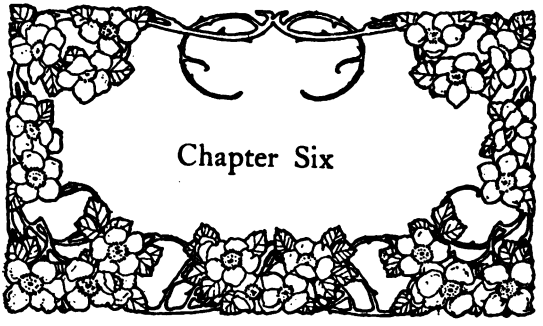
Since the time of the Medusa a look cannot petrify, so Miss Erroll abandoned the attempt, turned from him, and walked with dignity into the house. The maid told her later in the evening that she had found five sovereigns on the tea-table.

Three months after the announcement of bankruptcy the ten-days' sale of the Earl of Watermead's effects caused a great sensation in London,

and money seemed to be very plentiful, for in many cases the prices paid were enormous.

The automobiles were to be disposed of on the tenth day of the sale. Trumble asked for the ninth day off, and received it; whereupon, to the amazement of the aged Mr. Rolls, he walked into his solicitor's offices.

Chapter VI



IT was an alert, business-like young man who called upon Mr. Rolls, and the man of law had some difficulty in recognizing this as the same person, languid and bored, who had left that room three months before with a hundred pounds in his pocket.

"How long am I to be in pawn, Rolls?" he asked briskly.

"Well, your lordship, the sale has turned out so unexpectedly good that, with the letting of Watermead, I think——"

"Letting Watermead? To whom are you thinking of letting Watermead?"

"Sir William Dillow."

"What, that bounder? I'll never allow Watermead to be contaminated by him, even for a week!"

"I'm afraid, my lord, negotiations have gone too far and, if you will pardon me for saying so, you have really nothing to do about it until the debts are paid."

"How far short will the proceeds of the sale leave us?"

"That I can't say until to-morrow night. If the automobiles go as well as the other things, I think we'll come out about even."

"Oh, it was regarding the automobile sale I wished to see you! I want you to bid in that Brusier-Grolier."

"I'll see to that, my lord."

"And remember, Dillow doesn't get Watermead."

"I'll do what I can, my lord," said Mr. Rolls, who was in more cheerful humor than when the Earl had last seen him.

When the young man returned

to South London he said to Doctor Mead:

"Wouldn't you like to have an automobile that would carry four or five, so that you might take your friends out now and then if you wished to do so?"

"I have often thought of it," replied the doctor.

"I've spent to-day in looking round, and have found a man who owns a car several sizes too large for him, which he is quite willing to exchange for this little single-cylinder of yours."

"How much money does he want in addition?"

"He will trade even, I think."

So the ineffective single-cylindered

machine disappeared, and the magnificent King of the Road came in its place, the innocent, unworldly doctor saying calmly, as he walked round it, that although it was a little large, he nevertheless believed that John had made a very good bargain.

From Miss Kate Erroll a formal letter came to the young man containing a five-pound note. He returned it in a communication almost equally formal, saying that the lending of the money had been a friendly, not a business, transaction. Unless, therefore, the repayments could be made on a friendly, not a business, basis, he refused to receive them, and was hers very truly, John Trumble.

To this there was no reply. A

week later the doctor said to his chauffeur:

"The missis and I think of taking an afternoon off to-morrow in the new automobile, and Miss Erroll has kindly consented to accompany us."

"That will be very pleasant," said Trumble, "and I shall see that the machine is in perfect order."

Next day, after lunch, the big motor-car was in readiness. Doctor and chauffeur wore appalling goggles, and the ladies were heavily veiled.

"Would you like to sit with Mrs. Mead, my dear, while I sit beside our excellent driver, whom we must humor to-day, for our lives are in his hands?"

Before she could reply the chauf-

feur who was to be humored spoke up:

"It would be better if you took your usual place behind, doctor. I am responsible for the balance of the machine, you know. Miss Erroll will sit beside me."

"Oh, very well!" said the doctor, and Miss Erroll, making no audible objection—how could she when she was the invited guest?—took her place beside John Trumble.

"Where to, Doctor Mead?" he asked.

"Anywhere you like, John. Get out into some quiet country road, and not too fast, remember."

John threaded his way very cautiously through suburban thorough-

fares until he reached the country road that led to Watermead, where they bowled along at a rate close on twenty miles an hour. Miss Erroll kept a rigid silence, but once out in the country John turned to her brightly, and said:

"You may speak to the man at the wheel, you know. It isn't prohibited as is the case on board ship."

"Really," she replied, with a little laugh, "I thought the automobile needed all your attention."

"Oh, not a tenth part of it!"

"It is very pleasant. Is this as fast as the car will go?"

"Not quite. But I dare not put on full speed. I am under the doc-

tor's orders you know, as if I were an invalid."

Miss Erroll laughed, and the conversation was broken by a deep-toned "*Honk!*" to the rear.

Trumble cast a look over his shoulder, and his frame seemed to stiffen. He recognized the great Hardpan of Sir William Dillow. A professional chauffeur sat in the steering seat; Sir William and Dolly Carmichael in the tonneau. "*Honk! Honk!*"

"I think, John," said the doctor timorously, "that motor-car behind us wants to pass."

"Very good, sir; I'll give them all the road they require." replied John grimly.

"I'm sure he wants to pass, John," cried the doctor nervously.

"I'm sure he does, too, sir," replied Trumble.

The motor-car was purring like a great cat, yet nevertheless the other overhauled her. The big, polished, shimmering brass lamps of the Hardpan came abreast the tonneau of the Brusier-Grolier.

"*Honk, honk, honk, honk!*" cried the Hardpan, for the road was none too wide. The deep bass voice of Sir William roared forth almost like his fog-horn.

"Hang it all, Lavier, why don't you get out of this dust? Pass them, man!"

"That's a Brusier-Grolier, my

lord," said the man over his shoulder.

"Bruise it, then. Put on everything you've got!" demanded the baronet.

"Stop, John!" commanded the doctor; "Stop and let them pass! You're going too fast: we'll have a smash in a minute."

"Yes, sir, I'm doing my best," said John, bending his head.

"*Honk, honk!*"

"Are you going to let them pass?" asked Kate in a thrilling whisper.

"What! With you beside me? Not likely! We've had enough of this fooling; now we'll show them why our number is fastened to the tail of the tonneau."

"Bravo!" said the girl, and for

a moment her hand touched his arm.

"*Honk, honk, honk!*" cried the Hardpan.

"*Boom, boom, boom!*" replied the Brusier-Grolier.

Hitherto it had been purring like a cat, now the sound increased and intensified until it resembled the roar of a tiger. There was no jerk or leap forward, but a glorious steady increase that seemed to promise an infinity of reserve force in store.

Hedges and fields flew past, and the strength of the blast pressed back into the doctor's mouth his unspoken words of alarm and caution. Great gates in front stood temptingly open, and slowing down, John passed

through them and brought his car to a standstill.

The man at the lodge touched his cap. John slipped off his goggles, and the man almost jumped out of his boots, but before he could speak Trumble commanded:

"Close these gates! Bolt and lock them. Bolt the small gate, too. Let no one inside without my permission. Send down word to that effect to the other entrances." And before the man could reply the automobile was tearing up the noble avenue until it stopped in front of the great house. Here were preparations for tea on the terrace. An old woman came out to them.

"Is this Sir William Dillow?" she asked.

"No, Mrs. Standish. Tea for four on the terrace as soon as possible."

"Oh, my lord! Welcome home, my lord!"

"There, there, Mrs. Standish, run away and see to the tea!"

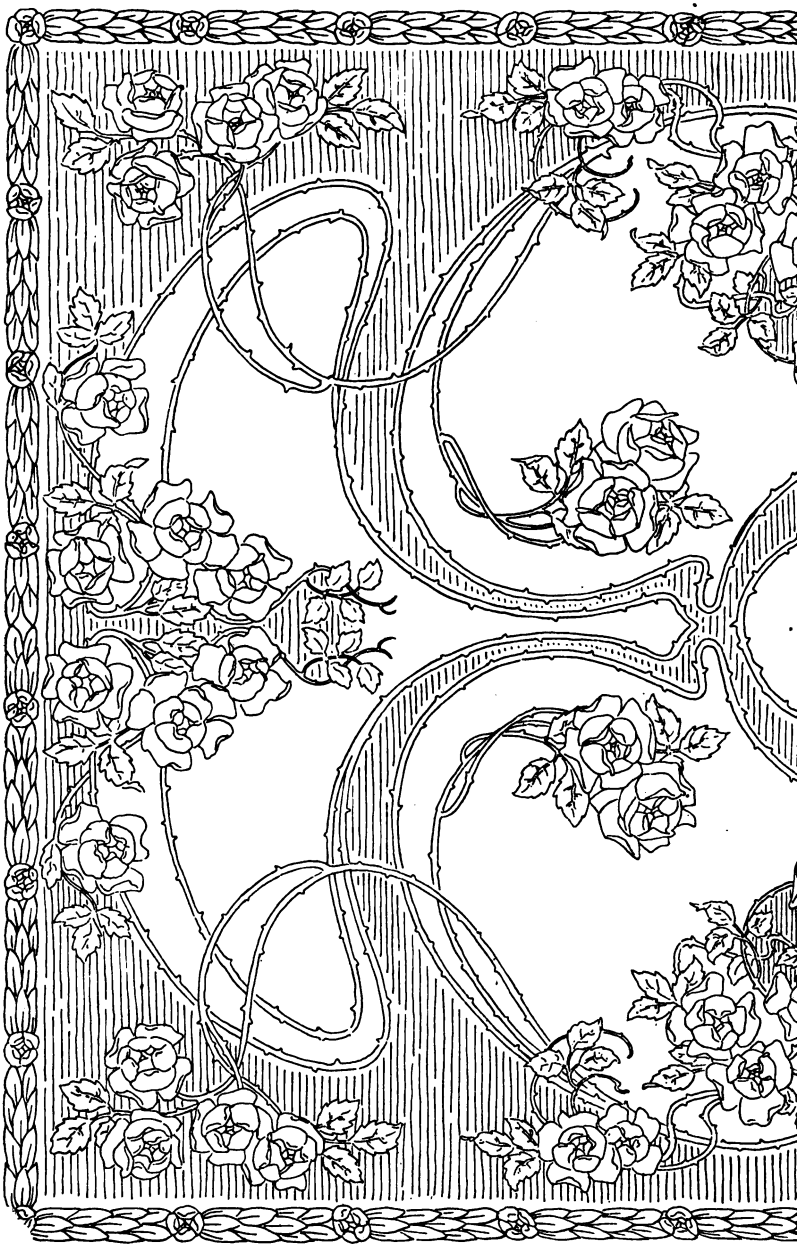
The man from the gates came whirling up on a bicycle.

"Sir William Dillow's there, my lord, and says he has a permit."

"You tell Sir William to go to—the next village, where he'll find excellent accommodation at the Red Lion," said Trumble.

Kate Erroll had raised her veil,

and was looking intently at the chauffeur.

"What does all this 'my-lording' mean, Mr. Trumble?"

"It means, my dear, that John Trumble, Seventh Earl of Watermead, has still enough influence here to order tea for his friends. It means that to-day we are taking nobody's dust. It means that Watermead House hopes to please the future Countess."